

Valley Program for Aging Services in Waynesboro, VA

A rural and extremely isolated group of seniors participated in the “Eat Better, Move More” program sponsored by the Valley Program for Aging Services based in Waynesboro, Virginia. In two Allegheny Mountain communities, 45 participants, mostly women in their 70s, completed the 12-week program. Participants increased their number of steps taken daily, and reported feeling better and having more energy.

Program staff observed participants reading food labels in the grocery store on a regular basis. They were also seen purchasing healthier foods and trying new fruits and vegetables.

Gentle peer-to-peer rebukes have been observed, when one or more of the participants choose “not so healthy” foods at the store and white bread is no longer offered as a snack at the senior centers. Participants have switched to whole-wheat toast and sugar free jam and even the regional staple, apple butter, has been replaced with a sugar free variety.

The Valley Program for Aging Services reports that participants in the “Eat Better, Move More” program were very interested in learning about nutrition. Participants found that increasing physical activity through walking can be effective and fun. The staff also learned that many misconceptions about nutrition had been conveyed to participants through their health care providers. Physician education about the importance of low and non-fat dairy products has been promoted.

Attendance proved not to be a problem in the two Allegheny Mountain communities. Participants were always ready to learn more and report their weekly achievements. The staff has added a healthy recipes component to the program based on requests and feedback. Program staff believe that if their program can succeed in such a rural and isolated location, You Can! partners can achieve success in any area of the country.